

CongressDaily, January 23, 2008

Complaining that Detroit dumps more sewage into the Great Lakes than any other city, Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., Wednesday urged the House Transportation and Infrastructure Water Resources Subcommittee to set a deadline ending disposal of waste in those lakes.

Kirk told the panel -- in the first of a series of hearings on water quality -- that Detroit is responsible for 12 billion of the 24 billion gallons of sewage dumped in the Great Lakes each year.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Oberstar praised Kirk for the passion he showed in making his case after noting that he plans to take up new water quality legislation this year.

Before cleaning up its act four years ago, Milwaukee had been dumping 4 billion gallons of sewage annually, Kirk said, but Detroit has not taken advantage of federal matching funds to improve its wastewater plants.

Setting an example, Chicago has set a deadline of 2027 for halting all such dumping in the lakes, Kirk said.

House Democratic Conference Chairman Rahm Emanuel of Illinois urged Congress to begin devising an update of the Clean Water Act.

"We need to develop comprehensive legislation that builds on the old clean water act, Clean Water Act Stage 2."

Although he praised Emanuel's idea, Oberstar stressed the "first challenge is enforcing existing law," and stressed that much more must be done on that front, citing GAO assessments that

show "we have been falling behind" on enforcing water quality standards

David Maurer, GAO's acting director of Natural Resources and Environment testified that the EPA has developed methods to measure only two of the nine water quality criteria set in 1995 by the EPA Great Lakes Initiative.

EPA has tools to measure adequately only the levels of mercury and lindane, Maurer said.

Benjamin Grumbles, EPA's assistant administrator for water, said the agency does not know have analytical techniques to measure the seven other pollutants such as PCBs, but it is working on developing them.